

Appropriations Committee Health Subcommittee  
House Bill 5037 AAC The State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023  
DMHAS  
Senator Osten and Representative Walker,

My name is Sheila Lake and I have worked at Reliance Health Inc. for 28 years. I am one of the more than 117,000 non-profit workers who live, work, and vote in communities all over Connecticut. The care and support we provide for those living in the community may go unnoticed because of the great work of non-profit providers. People are not living on the streets because we connect them to housing, case management, clinical and medical services. We provide employment opportunities and supports so that individuals can obtain jobs so they no longer rely on food stamps and other entitlements. Non-profit workers are here to help your family and neighbors in need and we do this in a cost effective, compassionate and skillful manner.

Since 2007, the non-profit community providers have lost more than \$461 million in state funding that has not kept up with inflation. In 2017 we were asked to give back up to 5% to the state budget. We were forced to cut or downsize vital programs. Wages in the non-profit sector have not been competitive compared to workers at the state doing similar or the same jobs. In the past two years we have lost employees to for profit companies offering higher wages. We have staff who say that they love working here but can no longer afford to stay. At Reliance Health, we have been short staffed leaving folks sitting on waitlists for months. Currently, our two case management programs have been down 4 staff which translates to 80 people without an assigned case manager to assist them. Thanks to the 4% increase from last year, we were able to raise salaries, but that increase still does not help us to keep employees who are leaving for jobs that pay more.

A group of Reliance Health staff people attended Lobby Day at the Capitol several years ago. We approached a group of legislators hoping to speak to them about the need for increased funding to help support non-profits. One legislator stopped us and said "Reliance Health? We don't want to talk to you because you don't pay your staff enough." Please understand that when you vote to increase funding to non-profits (with regular COLAs) non-profit workers get paid "enough". Our work can be rewarding, but it is also difficult and stressful. People should be fairly compensated for the work they do.

Your vote to increase funding to non-profits directly affects the more than \$117,000 non-profit workers and the individuals they support. We are the cost-effective choice.

Thank you for your time,  
Sheila Lake  
Reliance Health Inc.